

# HELP = HOPE

## A FORUM ON PTSD, AND SUICIDE AWARENESS, PREVENTION AND RECOVERY

Serving the needs of Clarke County Veterans, First Responders, their Families and Neighbors

In 2013, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs released a study that covered suicides from 1999 to 2010, which showed that roughly 22 veterans were committing suicide per day, or one every 65 minutes. Some sources suggest that this rate may be undercounting suicides. A recent analysis found a suicide rate among veterans of about 30 per 100,000 population per year, compared with the civilian rate of 14 per 100,000. The total number of suicides differs by age group; 31% of these suicides were by veterans 49 and younger while 69% were by veterans aged 50 and older. As with suicides in general, suicide among veterans is primarily male.

***This is a national crisis that has hit close to home.*** Over the course of the last year, VFW Post 9760 has experienced several losses due to suicide. The mission of the VFW and VFW Auxiliary is to serve our nation's Veterans, their families, and our community. In keeping with our mission we decided that it was time for us to take action. We determined that a public mental health forum to educate our community on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), build awareness of suicide and learn what we can do to prevent it as well as how to help survivors of suicide in their recovery would be appropriate.

### ABOUT THE EVENT

The **HELP = HOPE** event is for everyone in Berryville and Clarke County, however, we will have specialized focus on the needs of our Veterans, First Responders, and their families as this group is more likely to suffer the effects of PTSD than is the general population. There are more than 550 members of the Clarke County VFW and American Legion and more than 200 First Responders serving Clarke County.

The event occurs in two parts, Forum and Exhibition. The Forum will be led by speakers who are knowledgeable, skilled and accredited. The Exhibition will provide additional information on resources and organizations that provide direct and indirect mental health supports. Lunch will be served after the Forum to encourage further conversation and interaction with the panelists and exhibitors.

We anticipate 150 to 200 people will attend the event, making it the ***largest community mental health event in Berryville and Clarke County history.***

. The VFW is sponsoring this event as a service to our Veterans and First Responders, their families and our Clarke County neighbors. The event is planned, managed and staffed by volunteers from the Clarke County VFW and VFW Auxiliary. ***This is not a fund raiser.*** There is no cost to attend or participate.

The **HELP = HOPE** event is scheduled for September, which is Suicide Prevention Month, and will begin at 10:00 AM Saturday September 26, 2015 at Clarke County High School.

## OBJECTIVES

The **HELP = HOPE** Forum has four objectives:

- First, help our community better understand what each of us can do to prevent suicide.
- Second, better understand how we can help those who have lost a loved one to suicide in their recovery.
- Third, help those who may be suffering from PTSD and their families recognize the signs and symptoms of PTSD and know the resources that are available to treat the disorder.
- And fourth, know what steps Berryville and Clarke County are taking to avert PTSD among our first responders.

## FORUM PARTICIPANTS

Speakers at the Forum will address the following questions and respond to answers from the attendees.

- What is PTSD?
- What treatment options are available?
- How can I tell if a person may be at risk of suicide?
- How should I engage with the person?
- What happens if I call the police or sheriff and report a person who I think is at risk of harming himself?
- How does Berryville and Clarke County support our first responders to avert PTSD?
- What resources are available to help a person recover from a loss due to suicide?
- What can I do to help my friend recover?
- What mental health resources are available to the residents of Berryville and Clarke County?

The speakers will be qualified and experienced in their assigned topic. Speakers scheduled to participate in the Forum include mental health clinicians from the Martinsburg Veterans Administration Medical Center, Valley Health, Northwestern Community Services, Concern Hotline and Blue Ridge Hospice. Also scheduled to speak is the Berryville Chief of Police, Clarke County Sheriff and Clarke County Chief of Fire and EMS Services.

Following the Forum, several exhibitors will provide information on organizations, associations and businesses that provide mental health services and supports to Berryville and Clarke County residents.

## EXHIBITORS

The following organizations have been invited to exhibit at **HELP = HOPE**: VFW, VFW Auxiliaries, Boulder Crest Retreat, Virginia Wounded Warrior Project, American Legion, Concern Hotline, Blue Ridge Hospice, Lighthouse, Semper Fi Fund, Winchester Community Mental Health Center, Gary Sinise Foundation, First Responder Support Network of Virginia and American Legion Riders. Additional exhibitors are welcome to attend.

## EVENT SPONSORSHIP

The **HELP = HOPE** event budget is \$5,000. Budgeted items include the cost of marketing the event, event materials and venue expenses. There are no paid staffers supporting this event. All monies received in support of the event will be used to cover the cost of the event. Any monies not spent in direct support of the event will be donated to Concern Hotline. Valley Health has committed to sponsoring the event and has provided subject matter expertise and \$1,000 in financial funding.

As this event is for the citizens of Berryville and Clarke County the VFW and VFW Auxiliary invite both Berryville and Clarke County to sponsor the event as they feel appropriate. Specifically, the VFW and VFW Auxiliary ask that Berryville Town Council and Clarke County Board of Supervisors consider the following:

- Add the **HELP = HOPE** event to their official Calendar of Events
- Promote the **HELP = HOPE** event on the Town and County websites
- Encourage residents of Berryville and Clarke County to attend the event
- Provide financial support to cover the cost of the event

The VFW and VFW Auxiliary are excited about the possibilities this event holds for our community. Breaking the silence around suicide and mental health issues gives us the opportunity to come together to break down misperceptions and promote recovery and healthy communities.

*A single act of kindness can start a  
ripple of healing.*